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MIDDLE HARBOUR

AND OTHER VERSE

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IN MIDDLE HARBOUR

AND OTHER VERSE



IN MIDDLE HARBOUR

AND OTHER VERSE

CHIEFLY AUSTRALIAN

BY

THOMAS HENEY

LONDON

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1890

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO MY COUNTRYMEN

THE AUSTRALIANS,

IN THE HOPE THAT THOSE INTO WHOSE HANDS IT MAY COME

WILL RECOGNIZE IN IT

SOME FAITHFUL STUDIES OF LIFE AND LANDSCAPE

IN PORTIONS OF OUR COMMON COUNTRY

EVEN YET SO LITTLE KNOWN.

1361941



PREFATORY NOTE.



THE writer asks that in the perusal of this work it may be borne in mind that, living in Sydney, he has not had the valuable opportunity of revising in the printed sheet lines which he knows in manuscript only.

It may also be necessary to state that all the names of "runs" or stations employed here are chosen for metrical reasons alone. This explanation is made to prevent a possible, if improbable, annoyance.



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A SQUATTER OF '68.

TRAMP, tramp, tramp, along a verandah and turn ;
Tramp, tramp, tramp, whilst the rain falls thick and
long,—

Only another forced the world-old lesson to learn,
Fate—the race is not to the swift, the battle to the
strong.

These are the lands that were his, farther than vision can
pierce,

Here where he treads, the home he had made for his
bride ;

All of it passed to another, and therefore his anguish is
fierce,

Gone his ambition, his hope, lost is his purpose and
pride.

A man of the mould of men, tall and sinewy, straight,
Made for endurance, for toil, to win and to hold
alike stout ;

Young, but his lowering face showed stress of the mind's
sad freight ;

Inattent paced he, but now and then stopped to stare
out.

Sombre and lonely the scene in the fall of a wild wet
day,

Far off the hills and faint in a cold and a misty hue ;
The slant lines of the rain broke over the shallow grey
Of the claypan wide where tussocks of canegrass
grew.

Another man stood at his side, fell into step with him,
paced

Up the verandah and down, silent, respecting his
grief;—

You that are master to-day where I am a master displaced,
Listen to me while I tell a story bitter and brief.

Youngest son of a soldier, poor for place and services he,
Pure in his name and his fame and the well-earned
honour of men,

At manhood he, hating his calling, refused a commission
for me ;

“Then send me from England,” I cried, “and set me
no trade of the pen.”

In England no longer we heard from the sallow Australians
returned,

Nuggets and cradles and claims, but stations and cattle
or wool ;

So a new chum I came, my colonial experience learned
On a Victorian run—years of labour and jollity full.

One morn, my mail in my pocket, unthinking I rode
away

From my out-station and read, till one gave a blow to
my heart,

And I rode I knew not where, seeing him in the North
that lay,

Repeating, "The Governor's dead," as if so the pain
might depart.

Then I went back to my people ; in spite of their wish
I should stay,

Chose my lot in the South, where I seemed to have a
career.

In Melbourne, when I returned, they said, "Up North
is your way,

Fair country and cheap for a start ; you won't get any-
thing here."

It was the Riverine country the Victorian stockmen
possessed,

And over the Murray they swarmed with teams and
horsemen and herds.

We were too late in the choice ; for, ever ahead of the rest,
Hired bushmen took up the land, traversing the desert
like birds.

I and a partner worked the couple of blocks we had
chose.

Fortune was with me then ! The blacks were few in
our bound,

Seasons were good, cattle thrived, the market steadily
rose,

And then I went home, and the love of my life I found.

Tired of partnership when I came back we sold ; with
my share

I bought the right from a man who held this land as
in fee.

He never saw it. I heard it was very far out, but fair ;

‘ Bought it and came out ; and made it just what you see.

You drove up to the ‘Change in a coach that rattled along,
Making the pace on a road a new chum couldn’t mis-
take ;

You took your meals in hotels, and thought the bill rather
strong ;

Slept, or smoked, or yarned ; took the ribbons, as if
‘twas your break.

Mine was a different trip, when I came my country to
find,

I and a white man beside, and natives to help us to
track,

Not an ounce our horses bore that might have been left
behind—

Rations, water, clothes, and arms for the treacherous
black.

Find, mark you ; that is the task I had to do first.

The directions said : At Chidowla strike out fair for
the North ;

Thence for each mile worth less were our lives by blacks
and by thirst.

Into a white man's grave we went as we rode forth.

Then for the landmarks few the bushmen before us had
seen,

Mallee here, a dried lake, stony ridges, a water-hole
there ;

That once found we camped, and soon the boundaries
clean,

In our minds more distinct than in our rude tracings
were.

Now I went back, and in the nearest township I hired
Driver and team, and drovers to bring some stock on
the road,

Heaped up the team with stores, and led it myself,
inspired

By fear of mischance—our lives should depend on that
load.

You new squatters that come, pockets with money well-
lined, ~

And enter where earlier men have toiled and given
their years—

You who come in and praise or blame with indifferent
mind,

Little you know their labour, the cares and the age-
making fears.

When I came in, what I bought was the grass right on
hundreds of miles ;

Not a rod of a fence, not a house, not even a road or
a track,

Not a hoof; as for men, better none, for versed in all
craft and wiles,

Thievish and cruel and false, to each of those miles a
black.

They killed or scattered my cattle, as if in devilish fun
Speared or sweated my horses, the wretches ; that was
not all !

The best of my men with the mail a regular gauntlet run,
Came back only to die ; death after on sight to the
Myall.

Their blood on themselves ! Bullet for spear I repaid,
A black for a beast I exacted all over my run ;
They understood very soon the white man's wrath, and
afraid,
Skulked where the least or the safest mischief was
done.

Spite of all thrived the cattle ; mustering came in its time ;
A proud man I when I turned my first draft out for
the South ;

This was more than a step I had gained in my patient
climb,

My hopes were at last in view, sweet as drink at lips
black in drouth.

I was content as I rode, the cattle straggling ahead,
My dogs trotting beside, but out of the reach of my
whip ;
Heavy bearded and brown where once I was clear white
and red,
Booted up to my knees and grimed to my cabbage-
tree tip.

That all came off, as soon as I sold my cattle and trod
The broad flags of Collins St. East and squatter with
squatter sat,
Up in the plains Trida's lord, on all my acres a god,
In Melbourne a gentleman, too, and no forgetting of
that.

Year after year I came back to a place that was changing
fast.
Little I spent on myself, but much I bestowed on my
land ;
The bushmen and I rode up the boundaries right to the
last,
And fences followed our horses, there to this hour
they stand.

Here where I talk who through years did all as I say,
Tents took place of the gunyahs made of branches
and leaves ;
Next came a hut, now the kitchen, where fell the tents
one day,
Then this house, mine once, rain spouting from roof-
tree and eaves.

All the place changed from the spot I had squatted upon—

Yards stretched out in the plain, and a garden with alleys of shade,

Huts for the men, and tracks that plunged in the scrub and were gone,

I made it and loved it as men love that they only have made.

Often I reined in my horse as the homestead rose to my sight,

Rude another might think, but never to me was it rude ;

Here had I taken my ground, here was the heart of my fight,

Here had I striven and won from Nature not to be sued.

But it was lonely yet, in spite of perpetual toil ;

Empty and silent rooms but made me more longingly think

Of my promised bride—of her who, waiting on English soil,

At my sole word would have come, her life with my life to link.

When next I visited town the talk was of nothing but sheep.

“Increase on increase,” they said ; clear profit and certain the wool.

listened, discussed, and inquired ; earnest my thoughts
were and deep ;

Loth was I ever to change, but this change with
promise was full.

Yet long I revolved, debated, long I doubted, at last
Fatally clear seemed the gain ; for that I made choice
of the sheep,

Here must I wait for the present, I said ; no great
change is fast ;

But speedily as I might the cattle from Trida I'd
sweep.

Such a muster was that, the last one Trida should see,
From scrub and hill and glen we drove beasts brand-
less and wild,

And every hoof we lifted, till of big stock Trida was
free,

When we came back resounded the bleat of the
strange sheep mild.

I was deep in the debt of a bank, for I bought when
prices were high,

And, like a desperate gambler staking his all on the
dice,

I threw for a fortune or ruin—but only fortune seemed
nigh,

England and home, and love and marriage, worth the
risk thrice.

There is some blind, deaf chance that changes the lot
of men !

All my cattle had thrived, disaster came with the
sheep ;

Yet fair was hope, too fair ; we are wise the past in
our ken.

I threw and I lost ; 'tis a cur who stays to whine and
to weep.

Vain in the thirsty soil was scooped the tanks' yawning
bed ;

Vain in the blind sand creeks the dam breast-works
rose high ;

For sudden and fierce came drought, the irregular rains
instead ;

As of old, the earth was iron, as brass was the sunlit
sky.

Oh that season ! God, in the years that are yet to be
mine,

Shall it ever fade from my mind like the spell of some
cruel dream ;

Shall ever mine eyes forget the curse of that changeless
shine,

Mine ears be deaf to a cry, as of agony supreme !

The day came up in the East, calm and triumphant
and clear,

And moved with seldom a cloud from dawn to the
dim twilight ;

Over the plain swept tides of heat, the sky-line came
ever more near,
The dead air wavered, and pulsed to the aching of
the sight.

Sweet with a fatal charm were the languorous hours of
night,
Low and large burnt stars through a faint and lumi-
nous haze,
While soft slow passing airs brought fragrance wild and
light,
And morn seemed loth to lead one more of those
mad fierce days.

Yet ever the morning came, morning and noon and eve,
Ever the thirsty heat and the day-long blinding shine,
Ever the anxious night with its hopes and its fears
aweave,
And slow to pass were its hours that brought me no
anodyne.

Sometimes I lay in a hammock, my face to the starry
sky,
With a prayer that was half an oath, I saw the dense
clouds go,
And day came dull, and at dawn lo! heaven to earth
was nigh,
From hillock to hillock around hung rain-clouds dark
and low.

But a strong wind blew from the west, with an April fall
of rain

The masses o'erhead would move and by night the
heavens be clear,

And the day come up the east in his pride and his dis-
dain

Of the hopes that were foredoomed with his blaze
to disappear.

And again a wind from the west with a lurid pomp
would blow,

And hide the world in a pall of tawny dust and red,
Perchance to pass with a dole like tears on the earth
below,

But coolness came with the night, and sleep to a
weary head.

Day after day I mounted, rode out in the bare hot
plain,

With an aching in my eyes for the ruin I should see ;
Alone I rode far out, with an anguish ever in vain ;

And the face of that desert cursed was a thing to
dread and to flee.

As I rode the mirage grew, it shifted, it rose and fell,

Waves gleaming in leagues of lake, in the air the
palms asleep.

And I tossed my clenched hand out and cursed the
thing of hell,

For under my eyes on the earth I saw but perishing
sheep.

Around the miry edge of the shrunken and filthy pool,
And in corners of the tank stood dead and the living,
fast ;
To his victim fluttered down the crow like a loathsome
ghoul,
A shudder cruel to see through the living corpses past.

We dragged the living out, but the bleating wretches
came,
Tortured by thirst, at night, and perished before the
day,
Till the tanks gave life no longer, but pits as of death
their name ;
And when I approached, for despair I turned me
another way.

Ride where I might, no escape ; death and agony
everywhere ;
Heavily rose from their feast the hated and sated
birds ;
Death strewed the sands with his prey, and tainted the
stagnant air,
Festering carcasses now were pick and choice of my
herds.

Or under the clumps of bush, at the slender butts of the
trees,
Wearily halted the wreck of my flocks, too faint to
retreat,

Contorted some lay like dead, some upright though on
their knees,

Motionless most, but some as from habit seemed still
to eat.

The luck never changed for me. I stood it as long as
I dared.

Where could I turn? All I had, all I was, here
wasted and spent.

Man after man I paid off, held on and deeper de-
spaired

Till, "dried out" ourselves, I abandoned the station
and went.

All his cattle would have perished - all the same -

It was a season of ruin, I was but one of a crowd ;

On my retreat to the South I halted at places I knew,
Welcomed by men hard hit like myself, but dogged and
proud ;

Some of them came out right at the end, 'twas only
a few !

To me the bitterest part of the whole bitter business
began,

When like a schoolboy I told my tale to the Managers'
board ;

They gave me a longer credit, and bade me return to the
run

When the drought passed, and work and wait till
success was restored.

At the first news of a change I sped to the Station
again,

Vast was the toil required the work of the drought
to undo ;

But the season was good, we worked man and master
amain,

Ere the year was out sheep grazed and prospered the
paddocks through.

None, unless he had witnessed the change that came
on the land,

Could be persuaded such difference a season might
make ;

Dense in new growth the bush, herbage was deep on
each hand,

Claypans were wide-spreading meres, a tank was hid
in a lake.

Trust never returns to him who has suffered from
trust ;

When the fat sheep ran at the tread of my galloping
horse,

I saw at each bush its dead, I saw the waterless crust

In the forsaken tanks cake around each hideous corse.

Yet ever the months went by, and they brought to me
favour and grace,

Till it seemed there yet was hope of freedom to win
at the last ;

Under my eyes all thrived, soon knew I a happier case,
When under the shearers' blades the thick fleece fell
so fast.

Tier heaped on tier of bales it rose till the shed was
full,
And a deep impatience was mine, so long the bullocks
delayed.
I grudged the tardy beasts every mile they should drag
my wool,
And their drivers every meal, each halt, every camp
they made.

Premonition perhaps! One night a glare disturbed my
repose,
Through my sudden stupor rang the cries of the men
outside,
Their cries and the roar of flames on the quiet midnight
rose,
And the stench of the singeing wool spread out
through the cool air wide.

It was a terrible blow, because I had felt so secure ;
That clip meant respite for me, and a lessened debt
at the bank.
Surely, I held in my heart, misfortune can never endure ;
Give me but time, and I'll prove my luck is not
blank.

Why didn't you have it insured? you duffer!

There did seem a promise ; as came and sped the
following years,
The seasons held good and the flocks made a steady
increase,
So that I heard, as a man his reprieve, the click of the
shears,
And reckoned the yearly returns from the heavy masses
of fleece.

Judge if my heart was not light as that debt perceptibly
fell,
Think what I had at stake—my pride as a man in my
power,
Pride to conquer for her who here in the future should
dwell,
And hear with pity and love of my dark and triumph-
ant hour.

Then came a dry season, a nothing ; the bankers' de-
mand
Followed with eager speed, to surrender the station
or pay ;
You know the rest, for you bought ; and I am here at
command,
To hand the run over, and go—to hell, if that is my
way.

THE SHEARER.

THE August day is ended, and the moon is full and
bright,
And the world itself seems sleeping in the cold, impassive
light ;
At the river's edge the trees are, white above, dead black
below ;
On the water, like a dream flood, stealthy ripples come
and go.

Clear and keen with frost the air is, sharp each outline
meets the eye,
Sheds and pens and paddock, plain and bush, all
silent lie,
And a subtle thrill of sadness warns the gazer thus to
see
How the night dwarfs men and labours, to the world how
short-lived we.

Dawn shall blush, and morn come, and the sun flame
down the west,
But the hours shall pass unheeded as a vain voice o'er
his rest ;

For these young eyes which this morning saw the sky
begin to burn
Lost the magic of the daylight that to them cannot
return.

In the hut the meal is over, and about the big bare room
They were sitting who but lately took the dead man to
his doom,
On a plank beneath the window, with their faces to the
blaze,
Leaning outwards smoking, old hands tell of him and
vanished days.

Do you mind, Jim, one is saying, how he joined us at
a shed,
Four years back upon the Lachlan—ah yes, it was Be-
rembed ?
There was rain about the district, and the fellows mostly
stuck
At the shanties on the roadside till the weather changed
for luck.

But the boss was in a hurry, and he started us to shear,
For he meant to go to England when the clip was off,
that year ;
When a youngster, he that's lying in the harness-room
to-night,
Said he'd work a pen, and got it, and we took to him on
sight.

He was just that sort of fellow you must either like or
not,
Good at any game you started, he cared very little what ;
Run a hundred yards, or wrestle, sing and dance and
play, or fight,
Thrum a fiddle, yarn or pledge you, heart and hand
together light.

He could shear, too, and his tally, he the youngest of
the board,
Made the ringer stare a trifle when he saw the numbers
scored ;
From his flying right hand fell all day the thick wool
fold on fold,
Burly, black, and matted outward, but inside as bright
as gold.

Day by day we saw him bending on the floor above his
sheep,
Saw the sweat on face and shoulders, heard the shear-
blades clash and leap,
Then a white shrunk thing went bleating forth, to join
the mob again,
Not a patch of blood and tar her creamy fleece to stain.

That was how we met him, when the shed at last cut
out,
On and on he came amongst us, and since then each
year about,

Sure as shearing, he rejoined us, from down Wagga way
he came,
Like him once, and like him always, for he ever was the
same.

He was this, whate'er his faults were, white man through
to friend or foe,
Fair as daylight, true as heaven, seldom to a mate said
"No ;"
Shared his camp with whom he trusted, shared his purse,
his swag, his all,
Never made his kindness burden, put his gifts beyond
recall.

And he drowns in dead back-water, where the men go
down to swim,
With a dozen friends around him, who would give their
lives for him.
Not a sound until we missed him ; some one said then,
"Is he drowned ?"
Dived and searched the muddy shallow ; in the hut lies
all we found.

Even now the tools are speaking of the coffin in the shed,
There, ere night has gone and morn come, we shall help
to lay him dead.
Where the station graves are scattered, there'll be one
more newer heap,
Haply at next shearing none will heed who there may
sleep.

It is best as it has happened ; many ways have we to
die ;

Some are bitter, few are tempting,—in the end, alike we
lie

Under heaven that lifts above us, or where skillion roofs
are low,

Oft outwearing strangers' patience, oft our own, before
we go.

Once his cheque is spent, a sick man to the saddle climbs
and turns

Forth his face into the desert, where the road he scarce
discerns.

Falls with hideous forms around him ; well for him if life
be fled

Ere the eagles, grown emboldened, settle round the help-
less head.

They who fall so, linger little ; for myself, I hold it
worse,

From the corner of a shanty hear the fellows laugh and
curse,

Living o'er the past eternal, yet forgot the sick man lies,
And, his comrades still carousing, turns his face down,
and so dies.

FOUND DEAD.

TO-DAY the trooper returned ; in his officer's hands he
placed

All the remains of a man who met his death in the
waste—

A swagsman travelling to reach the homestead of old
Retreat,

Had got off the water and died, naked and mad with
the heat.

Here are the photographs five, not for nought had they
borne

Many a summer's heat, now faded and shrivelled and
torn.

This was his own, said the trooper ; the inspector takes
up a card,

Another of his, but altered ; between them his life had
been hard.

First was a man of the English type, stalwart and fair
and young,

Telling in all its lines of one from ancestry sprung,

Pleasant in mouth and eye, graceful in contour and line,
Steady of gaze, but frank—an athlete, strong and yet fine.

Years older the other seemed, with a countenance
bearded and spare ;

Under a broad-leafed hat the eyes had a moody stare.

Yet there was sadness, too, a something of shame and
of pride,

Ashamed to confess what the handsome face might not
hide.

Who does not know it? Who has not seen it?—the
change

That takes a man, and produces what subtly and ever
estranged ;

The new chum breaking apart from his English tradition,
his caste,

And mad with the new wild life, makes progress, too fast
to last.

The rest of the cards were women's ; here, in the first, is
a face

Calm and high-bred and old, with age's dignity grace ;
Softness it had, never weakness ; strong with victorious
years,

—And her face is the mould of that the fierce sun
blackens and sears !

And this is a girl's fair face, but kinship between them is
none.

Life had lessoned the elder, for this it scarce was begun.

Kindness and infinite trust, goodness, purity, youth,
Writ in this sweet face were, the living witness of
truth.

Faded by sun, not by age ; warped by the blaze on the
plain,
Frayed by fingers that held whilst eager eyes over
again .
Conned and studied, as if with intent to remember for
aye
All the freedom and grace that in those lineaments lay.

An imperious face, this girl's ; the gazer's her large eyes
held,
And challenged a homage thence by her charm and her
will compelled ;
On her lips no laughter lived, neither smile nor frown
was there,
But a force to take men's hearts by grace of womanhood
rare.

She had lived and loved ; it was writ in no blemish, in
no stain.
Hers was that beauty which grows completer with joy
and with pain,
Not that which seeks and is sought, and giving back
flame for flame,
Burns into darkness swift and lends to dishonour a name.

Piece, then, the tale who will, let them censure, ignore,
let them say
For a girl's sole sake he has cast himself and his life
away ;
Nothing to give you more had life, you had love which
is all men crave ;
Comrade unknown, may earth be light on your unmarked
grave.

AT THE TANK BEFORE DAY.

IN the air the stars are dusk, yet the slow approach of
day

Makes a wan dawn in a hand's-breadth of the sky,
And the twilight like a mist seems to melt and fade
away ;

Darkness yonder, only dimness is anigh.

Here few nights bring dewy cool, and the dawn air dry
and hot,

Holds the senses like a languor long and deep,
Seeing, hearing, thinking nought ; past and present all
forgot,

Thus to wake, to lie, is as a dream of sleep.

Through a dry smell of the earth from the piny bush
around

Slow faint savours as of incense rise and spread,
Out afar the hills loom dark, with dim lines their mass is
crowned,

And pale the stars together blench o'erhead.


Beyond the pallid mirror of the water in the tank,
Shapes 'twixt earth and air in twilight came and went,
Silent, ghost-like, swift, save that as they rose and sank
In the sullen hush a heavy noise was sent.

THE BOUNDARY RIDER.

THE bridle reins hang loose in the hold of his lean left
hand ;
As the tether gives, the horse bends browsing down to
the sand,
On the pommel the right hand rests with a smoking briar
black,
Whose thin rings rise and break as he gazes from the
track.

Already the sun is aslope, high still in a pale hot sky,
And the afternoon is fierce, in its glare the wide plains
lie
Empty as heaven and silent, smit with a vast despair,
The face of a Titan bound, for whom is no hope nor
care.

Hoar are its leagues of bush, and tawny brown is its soil, ||
In that immensity lost are human effort and toil,
A few scattered sheep in the scrub hardly themselves to
be seen ;
One man in the wilderness lone ; beside, a primeval
scene.



Firm and upright in his saddle as a soldier upon parade,
Yet graceful too is his seat, for Nature this horseman
made ;

From childhood a fearless rider, now like a centaur he,
And half of his strength is gone when he jumps from the
saddle-tree.

Back from his sweat-wet hair his felt is carelessly placed,
Handkerchief at his throat, sagging shirt round a lank
firm waist ;

True to the set of strong loins the belted moleskins are
tight,

Plain from forehead to stirrup a virile vigour in sight.

Yet scarce more than a boy, but the long blaze not more
sure

Has left on the countenance spare a hue that shall ever
endure,

Than the life of the plains has set reliance and courage
there,

Constancy, manliness frank in a young face debonaire.

He should be no less who rides for ever each spacious
bound,

Better than human speech he knows the desert around.

He journeys from dawn to dusk, and always he rides
alone,

The hue of the wilderness takes, as his mind its
monotone.

He hears the infrequent cries, shrieking or hoarse and
slow,
Sheep bleating, the minah's scream, the monologue of the
crow ;
He rides in a manless land, and in leagues of the salt-
bush plain,
Seeks day after day for change, and seeks it ever in vain.

Superd

In his hands his life each morn as he swings to his
leathern seat,
Woe to him if he falls where as water the plain sucks
heat,
Alone in a vast still tomb, cruel and loth to spare,
Death waits for each sense and slays whilst the doomed
wretch feels despair.

?

PIONEERS.

WE sat in the deep verandah, the dark was close around,
The last soft chords of a nocturne even yet seemed to
 sound,
The stars were low and splendid, the night was full of
 peace,
A summer day had ended and its cares and toils did
 cease.

Unnoticed upon us silence stole and we sat as dumb,—
It was that hour when mem'ries out of the far past come ;
The present fades ; about us scenes, faces, voices nigh,
Long years since gone ; forlornly we wake and unthink-
 ing sigh.

I thought as I rode this morning across from Yandama
 here,
Said one, that this day to me is that I should hold most
 dear ;
Fifteen years ago now, but it comes back clear as to-day,
My first brush with the Myalls far out up the Cooper
 way.

A lad just out from home, in Brisbane the first week met
A cousin in town on a spell—he manages Thargo yet ;
He pressed me to come back with him ; I went in the
hope to see

This life of the bush on hearsay I thought to be wild and
free.

Out back I had much to learn, to forget a great deal
more,

But I wasn't a new chum long though the teaching was
curt and sore ;

Dressed, lived in the station way, and found what there
was of work,

Soon to be liked all round as one who never would shirk.

So I stayed, I liked both the life and the fellows about
the run ;

For the life—there was plenty of work and after good-
natured fun.

Health, youth we had, and freedom, there in a world our
own,

The happiest days of my life I see now they are for ever
flown.

Oh, it was life ! no matter if hundreds of miles away,
Stretched bush or plain or scrub that was under our
single sway ;

Where hardly a white man's gaze had rested before, we
rode,

There was none could bid us stay as far as the stock
tracks showed.

A clerk in an office in Brisbane can pull out his maps
and tell
Each feature of that vast run as if he knew it quite well ;
But we—we gave it those names he speaks so fluently
now,
Years before him we knew it, and no easy lesson I vow.

Look from the topmost height (and not very high at
that),
Strain eyes, add plain to plain, and flat astretch beyond
flat.
There was not a house, save one, not a road that was
more than a track,
To an English county a white, no women save gins of
the black.

In the heart of it all we lived a life that was hard yet
free ;
In the saddle all day, at night no woovers of sleep were
we ;
Such is the school whence come men silent, impassive,
grand,
Thews and endurance of iron, souls even fate to with-
stand.

A draft of young cattle the boss had sold, and agreed to
send
To a station forming out west, the farthest, and called
“ Land’s End.”

There seemed no peril, save me the party were bushmen
tried,
Yet only am I alive, and this is the way they died.

A week we were out, camp was made and watches were
set one night,
Although the country was new we had seen no cause for
affright ;
In the scrub, a water-hole close, our fire blazed open and
clear,
Out on the plain hard by the cattle fed without fear.

It was after midnight I rose at the call of him who
turned in,
Saddled my horse and mounted, rode out the watch to
begin.
Like this 'twas a night of summer, a late red moon sank
slow ;
Through the plain from all around long shadows seemed
to grow.

Soon she set, the few stars left were pale by her parting
light,
Blank darkness settled upon me, vainly I strained my
sight ;
Time stood still, and a chill came, dawn before, in the
sullen air,
The silence was full of evil, uneasy the whole herd were.

Listen ! my heart stopped sudden in grip of a dead cold
fear,
Heard never before, by instinct I knew the thud of the
spear ;
Silence lasted a moment, a maniac chorus rose,
Gibberish and shrieks infernal, the pæan of ambushed
foes.

'Twas hell. My mare stood shuddering till the spur
sank in her side,
In that instant the cattle scattered, towards camp I
made my ride.
About it the devils swarmed, as I rode the long spears
flew,
The naked bodies I felt as their ranks my horse broke
through.

From my mates was never a sound ; I doubted not as
they slept,
Beneath the terrible spears to death and awaking they
leapt.
I dared not cooey and wait, my life was an instant
flight.
To pause would make me the aim ; in this murk the
blacks had sight.

Yet revolted my soul at leaving. Had sound come then
or a sign,
By my mates I had stood to death, and their fate had
chosen for mine.

With a plunge through the dying fire the hoofs spurned
brands aflame,

In a whizzing rush around sped spears with a random aim.

Silent—God, the wise brute!—with a leap superb my
horse

Rose, and a frightened shudder flew through each
muscle's course,

At her throat clung a supple savage, both his long arms
upthrown,

The jerk displaced and he sank—beneath us I heard
him groan.

Another hung by the reins, a cruel weight on her head ;
I slacked, he dropped, but recovered, and held by the
mane instead.

In a thought I unbuckled a stirrup, and brought down
the iron fair,

Smashing the guessed-at face,—and over him flew the
mare.

Life, life ! And the gallant brute she went like a thing
inspired,

And settled down in her stride as if with my spirit fired.
I turned my head at a rise, and the Myall crew behind,
The leaders with firesticks, came the flying traces to find.

“ They mean it, old girl,” I said ; “ well, they'll need to
make up for the start.”

She knew, and reefed at the reins ; I'd have kissed her
out of my heart.

With sudden agony smote, the flesh tore along my back,
A ghastly pause, and I heard a sharp and a splintery
crack.

In the scrimmage a light spear struck ; but I heeded it
not at all,
Knew it not till at the neck a bush broke the thin shaft
tall.
With a foot of barb in my side, I rode I knew not where,
But the desert was mercy's self, with the Myall only
despair.

Clammy and cold and wet, the shirt grew stiff on my
side,
And as it held it stanch'd the gush of the blood. I had
died
In the saddle of weakness sheer had it lasted, yet dared
not wait ;
Hell's thirst was in my throat—but if caught, like hell
my fate.

As I rode the dawn had broke, the morn was fair and
cool,
Yet I would the dark might last, while I lay at a desert
pool.
The water I found, and dismounted to drink ; when I rose
again
I staggered and fell with weakness, spite of the life-
draught ta'en.

At length I sat in the saddle, by many an effort won,
Myself too spent to guide, gave head to the mare for her
run ;

The way unknown, yet to me 'twas the same whether
wrong or right,
But life was fair, and I trusted to keep it in all despite.

For pain could I not sit up, on the pommel I crouched
down low,
And swung like a drunken man, as the mare swung to
and fro ;
My head swam, and before me stretched ever a blood-
blurred mist,
The ground beneath one instant was firm, then 'twould
spin and twist.

With me are vague dreams still of that ride in delirium
spent,
And what is the dream, what real, I know not, so are
they blent.
Until 'twas all forgot I think it was not all pain,
And ever a something drove to a goal I should attain.

The stockmen, across whose path some kind fate bade
me go,
Told how in the early dusk came neighing a lame horse
slow,
Spent with fatigue ; and on it hung, with a dead man's
grip,
What seemed a dead man first, a spear in one rigid hip.

Neck and hands were flayed by the scrub through which
he passed ;

At the face they lifted up with pity they stood aghast ;
Blood and the horse's spume, dust and a sick man's
sweat,

Deepened the agonized look in unconscious features set.

AT THE GROOM'S HUT.

Sky and plain are filled with glare, the air is hot and
still,

Yet wherever vision rests, the heat waves throb and
curve,

Far out, moving slowly on as if some magician's will
Compelled them, high red pillars misty bend and
swerve.

Amongst the hoar grey bush stray gusts of wind, and
fling

Into the hot air dust that spins like a dervish dance,
And lengthens and sways and leans in red loose ring on
ring,

In ghost-like silence glide through the plain, retreat,
advance.

Yonder the whirlwind spun, but now the horizon is clear,
And a white sea, waveless, lies leagues out by a white
long shore,

Masses of verdure rise out of that placid mere ;
But a quick distortion comes—for one lake behold a
score.

Empty sky, silent plain, whirlwind, mirage, blinding
light—
Sad the vast landscape is, as if brooding on races
dead ;
Gaze and gaze, see nought around that gives to the mind
respite
From a sense of menace fierce, by a power hid and
dread.

Stood a woman in the doorway of the groom's hut at the
change ;
Frankly stared at us, who waited for a new team in
the trace ;
At her breast her baby slumbered, and it seemed of all
most strange,
Even here the dearest witness of the hope of all our
race.

Love suffices. Love, that bids a woman cling to man
and trust,
Follow him into the desert, bear his burdens, soothe
and aid ;
Live as lonely as the landscape, and forget the distance
thrust
'Twixt her kin and this bare dwelling, wait the future
undismayed.

Make a home of this poor gunyah in the wind-swept
empty plain,
Out of poverty extracting all that makes the hut a
nest,—
For the sake of some rough bushman, e'en to her a
churlish swain,
With maternity transfigured when his babe lies on
her breast.

IN THE LIGNUM.

WHEN summer reigns in a land drought-smitten
The channels red are agape with thirst,
And the grey low flats where his hand has written
Sentence, shrink like a face accursed.

And ever are silent of all sweet voices—
The crow's harsh note or the swan's wild scream,
The shrill alarm of the ducks, and noises
Of parrots, mix like a sick man's dream.

The eye is filled with the colours pallid,
Bush-grey, glaucous, or pale dull green,
Faint as if summer long and calid
Blended all to a dreary mean.

Up from the bare ground white and rotten
The lignum is black in a desolate plain,
Dead of despair in a place forgotten
Of sweet cool air and of gentle rain.

From dawn to dusk of the long day's shining,
Dark to dawn of the hot long night,
Blackened and blasted with hopeless pining,
Withered and broken as if by spite.

A wind comes over the bare plain moaning,
Creaking amongst the twigs it dies,
As if in penitence still atoning,
Strewn for ever pale ashes rise.

This is the mourning, the lamentation,
Requiem office for unshrived dead—
Men that strayed in this desolation,
Fell or slept, and the faint life fled.

Daily the hawk and the dog comes nightly,
With iron beak or with snarling fang,
Scattered and torn the long bones whitely
Glare or glimmer where dead wands hang.

The night is dark, low slow winds dreary
Fill with whispers the empty plain ;
They seem the voice of the world grown weary,
In a perpetual sad refrain.

Shivers and groans the thin bush ever,
Things impalpable vex the gloom ;
This is their home where man stays never,
Save in the grip of his bale and doom.

Day brings nought of the bright day's gladness,
Light shows only what night possessed ;
Ever the emptiness, loneliness, sadness,
Ever a threat that is half expressed.

Sun or star or the cold moon beaming,
Changes never this solemn waste,
Where yet a spirit, a lost soul dreaming,
Looks for ever but cruel faced.

MOONLIGHT.

FAINT but clear across the breadth of plain and wood-
land

 Sound the evening bells afar,
Slow, but with a sweet persistence, gathering fulness
 That no careless echoes mar.

Night, long since close following on the steps of day,
hath come,

 And the white moon in the skies
Puts on slowly splendour with the growing of her light,
 In her pale arms darkness lies.

Each side of the narrow river stand the rows of lofty
trees ;

 All their leafy height is still ;
Half across the voiceless waters fall their shadows black
and sheer ;
 These the ripples slowly thrill.

On the other, every branch like silver upon ebon chased,
 And as moveless seems to be,
Fair and white, like bodies of the Dryads come to sight,
 Gleam the smooth trunks tall and free.

Oarless we float onward, and a shimmering wake astern
Noiseless breaks the surface clear ;
Onward far we see the line fantastic by the shadow traced,
Calm as on a windless mere.

Only sounds a hollow plashing of the waters past the
boat,
Heavy beat of wings in air,
Now and then accented by the screaming of night birds,
Like a cry forced from despair.

And the muffled flight of ducks that, though soft, the
stillness hears,
Or a crane's sharp choking cry ;
But for these the night were silent as a dream, and so
unreal,
Wrought like it of mystery.

Day has hopes, ambitions, cares and struggles and
delights,
Languor only has this night ;
We, like gods of all things heedless, being of all things
lords and free,
Calm as if Time ceased his flight.

DROUGHT.

Noon heat in air and silence and the glare
Of hazy shine across an empty land,
And in the vault intolerably filled
With unkind light scarce a slow eagle flew ;
No other life there seemed. What else would hold
Such [solitude with dreary sameness cursed,]
Where went vague breaths of heat by fits and ceased,
Spent with the burden of themselves, and out
Far 'gainst a white horizon rose the waves
Of heat that crossed and swayed and interchanged
Like the sick fancies of a fevered brain ?
Of aught the eye might stay on and forget
Heaven's glaring front and the lost verge of earth
There was none, but dead whiteness of still leaves,
With a salt hoar upon their misshaped face.
If such forbidding landscape changed, perchance
We rode across a grey soft plain wherein
At every stride the horses sank, and forth
Hanging the still air through a powdery dust
Rose, and the spurning hoofs tossed as we went
Dead clusters of sere leafless thorns that held
Loose in the rotten soil that gave them birth,

When a monsoon-like rain these level plains
To shallow meres that quickly vanished, changed.

Where the plains ceased low underwoods commenced,
Of growth diverse and name, now thin, now thick,
So that their olive heads high as the saddle showed,
And spread a floor of tangled branches far.
Apart and singly stood infrequent trees
With tall straight trunks, and limbless to the crown,
Thence dropping long their pendulous thin twigs.
Poor and infantile seemed man's handiwork
In that extent of desolation soft ;
And Nature seemed to scorn, for banks of soil
Up from the cisterns thrown her wilding growth
Hid not, but far across the plain they showed,
And all around tramped by the thirsty flocks
Bare as the mid-street of a city was,
And here and there bestrewn with whit'ning bones
Of sheep that weakened with long famine fell
Ere they could taste the water, or too faint
Reached it, and in the marshy margin sank,
While carrion-crows drew round, and would not wait
Their eager feast. Down at an ominous depth
A pool of mud unrippled lay ; poor stead
For that clear fluid no man knows to praise
Till at life's peril he has known its want.

Yonder what comes, hid in a pall of dust
So thick and high an army might beneath

Have formed? Slow, slow, not massed, but in small
groups,
Strong with the strong, and in the rear the weak,
Dragging with toil e'en their thin drought-spent forms,
Brown as the dust their wool; in dull faint eyes,
In the quick panting sides, the halting march
Or blind instinctive stumble towards the pool,
Half purposeless, the characters of death.

Where in this land accursed may eyes find rest?
There surely out against the western sky—
Sheets of blue water where the wavelets rise
And vistas of great trunks with breadths of shade,
Lawns and fair islets, green slopes in the sun,
And single palms high in the blue still air.

Damned semblance of a paradise that flies,
Mocking the intolerable day with dreams
Of happier lands that with their soft charm make
The burden of this landscape all too grim!
'Tis the mirage! Ghosts of all fair far scenes,
Made of what men here long for but not find,
Some desert Afreet daily conjures up
To curse with that we dare not hope to have,
The hideous present we cannot escape.

AU PRINTEMPS.

HE knows not all the bliss of life who ne'er
Has spent days in this blossoming wilderness
And made himself companion of the hours,
Drunk in the air with wild keen scent surcharged,
Filled eager eyes with all the series strange
Of landscape and its harmless denizens,
And heard the subtile music which no ears
Can wholly catch unless the soul be free.

Here where the year so gradually fades
That seasons merge and all the months are kind,
Even here has Spring her gentle characters,
And through a lawny land, in bush and grass,
Heralds her coming with a thousand signs
Her own the world around. The light is soft
Where softer shadows from the heavens cast
Chase not that shine away along their path.
Blowing like streamers of a fairy march
Out from rare tracery of the grass spears tall,
The dainty gossamers wave lines of light
That lead the gaze upon a flowery road,
Set with blue-bells all dancing in the sun,
Gold cups and daisies, lavender and white,
And chalices of virgin white that lift

Their spotless lips to lilac buds that burst
In a sweet shower from boughs of piny green,
That as the wind bends down their clustered blooms
Fill it with evanescent faint perfume.

In yonder copse what lustre of bloom gold,
Like sunshine meshed in their grey olive boughs,
From humbler beauties lifts the long gaze there !
And here dropped from a dense dark growth of leaf,
Curved like an Eastern krees, and crimson red,
Hang the wild fuchsia buds. There is no place
Where the wild sward has not some flowers among
Its tufted grasses with young seed spikes crowned.
Even the grey old groups of salt-bush hoar
Put on their only grace of leaf and bud,
And the low hop shrubs with rare burgeon stand
Blush pink and white and faint soft green, that shows
Shape, almost hue, of flowers, but lacks the name.

Such charm there is, and such a subtile bliss,
Even the loneliness of these wide plains
Takes on allurements, and no longer he
Who threads this maze of nature without man,
Feels grow upon him strangeness and a sense
Of some high power, too superb to be kind,
That charged the sunlit air and fragrant earth
With such a careless might that none resist ;
For now no longer proud, no longer cold,
All-working Nature in a sweeter mood
Makes even the clods grow sentient, and the world
Move to her ends by paths of ease and charm.

MAY IN TWO LANDS.

THAT first long day of summer in the north,
Filled with all grace and all delight of sense,
And with shy mysteries of Nature filled,
Who shall forget?

Not these far plains are glad
In all the hours that part the twilights twain
With such a sacrament of song.
But when with slow course and a radiance faint
The late morn makes her ascent up this way,
How few the strains that greet her and how weak !
Ere she came here what lands of pleasantness
Fell in the westering progress that she made,
What busy scenes of life those long leagues held,
And the kind ways and works of labouring men !
Sure some quick sense of contrast makes her pause
When at the verge of all this west she stands.
What wonder if her way be fleet across
The grey and lonely plains where, ashy white,
As touched with hoar of an unthawing frost,
The low clumps of the salt-bush never end,
Mixed with the dim dull-blue bush and the green
Of cotton ! And between the frequent knolls

The fine brown sand is blown in ripples short.
Often a wide expanse is seen where growth
Is none, level and wind-swept like a place
Set for some secret revels fit for feet
That blast all life and where they tread destroy.
Seldom a tree lifts up its welcome head
Above the level grey, but many a shrub
Shows a bright green in little copses dense.
Sometimes far seen against the distant sky,
The long and winding belt of river gums
Marks where beneath th' inconstant waters flow,
Or, it may be, in happier seasons flowed.
These gnarled, dark mighty trunks still prove
Where once the turbid waters poured their tide
Out on the thirsty plain, and islanded
Each bushy clump amid an endless flood.
Agape and red, like mouths drought-stricken, stretch
The deep and crooked billabongs, wherein
By torment of long days of ceaseless shine
The very earth to shapes uncouth and strange
Is forced, like a dumb creature agonized.
As if to part one plain from one alike
Low ridges run, and their loose sand faint red
Relieves the eye amid the dense dark pine
Or greener hop. Oft, too, a lonely mere
Spreads its bright mirror to the day, save where
Beneath the sombre lignum sleeps its tide
Clay-stained, and on its smooth expanse wild broods,
Not without fears, disport and feed and watch ;
Or, conscious of their safety out afar,

Curlew's
The black swans move but with the moving wave,
While from the hither shore the plover's wails
Come on the faint wind cool.

And soon the night
Gains with quick progress on the fading day.
Amid the gold and purple, crimson, pink,
And splendid white in airy dome on dome,
The faint shine of the evening star shows pale,
Till the short twilight passes like the day,
And the soft dimness of the night is pierced
With a long gleam across the vault and shine.
There is no wind, and earth like sky is still,
Till strange with silence, by the distance faint,
Yet kind in all this solemn hush of eve,
The tinkling music of some horse-bells sounds.
Nearer the strong flame of a campfire sways
Where long fantastic figures seem to flit
Unholy, in the shrinking wreaths of fire.

The night has made him captive who stands here ;
Which way he turns, lo, silent shrouded forms
Awaiting stand. The implacable stars glare down ;
A moaning comes along the hollow plain,
And halts and sobs and dies. A choking gasp
Makes even the air accomplice in some crime.
Now like a soul lamenting in the gloom,
Untimely freed, screams, each remoter, sound
By rustling wings pursued in dreadful flight,
Earth and the air are haunted ; night is theirs.

ETERNAL NATURE.

THE sunlight lies across the red sand plain,
The salt-bush glisters the haze beneath,
In the pendulous boughs of the leopard-wood
The minahs flutter and scold and scream.

What a lie is life, with her fair sweet mask
That hides a skeleton's mocking grin !

She alone is constant ; it is we who err,
Cursing her changeless with our changing moods.
Hoar plain, sun, haze, and darting birds,
The first man saw it with a fearless mind,
But we tormented with enigmas gaze,
We whom the silence and the days accuse.

*FOR AN ANNIVERSARY OF ALL
SAINTS.*

TO-DAY the Churchmen around their altars
Gather in one triumphant prayer,
All lives incommemorate singly—
Saints of ages and everywhere.
In their lips are your names unspoken,
In their legends your faithful toil
Has no separate praise, forgotten
The service that wrought your soul's assoil.

But the Church remembers her servants only,
And strictly stated in prayer and creed
Are clauses and terms of the heavenly covenant
By which they have won the awarded meed.
My count of all souls is of wider reaching ;
Out through the centuries past and near
I number the saints of humanity, heedless
Of creeds they hallow, of gods they fear.

O teachers, confessors, O virgins, martyrs,
Because ye were these is your fairest fame ;
Whate'er the temptation ye met and vanquished,
Because ye vanquished is all your claim.

What is't to us if ye thought of Nirvana,
Painfully treading the road of cares?
What if the dream of the Christian's heaven
Lifted your hearts before you there?

Manhood is nobler than any religion ;
Earth, not heaven, has dues and cares,
And life a magic to take men's strivings,
And rise by them as on hidden stairs.
There, where one age by painful effort .
Places her flower of men and waits ;
There, though slowly, shall come the many
Cowed no longer by frowning straits.

Thus by suffering and constant yearning,
Transmitting itself into noble deeds,
Our race receives as its choicest treasure
The life of its noblest sons ; for creeds
Outgrown and passed by our forward hasting
Have been the sacred eternal gain
Bequeathed to us down from unknown martyrs,
From lives forgotten of toil and pain.

It is not words which our eyes uncaring
See in the lines of hymn and prayer,
But aspirations of souls imprisoned,
Voices forced from out lives of care,
All mystery and passion and holiest fervour,
Purging itself of all sordid dross,

Summarized into a phrase of longing,
Pulsing yet with its first pathos.

Yet life has need of all service lowly,
Nor always asks for a shining creed ;
In that long road we must tread together
Occasion comes for the humble deed.
Once in a century wrongs unchallenged
Flaunt their strength and the meek truth spurn,
Then comes the hero the hour is calling,
And justice and truth to mankind return.

But down in the ways where the crowd is thronging,
Where many faint, and where many fall,
Deeds are done which the saints might envy,
Unrecorded in fame's roll-call ;
Ye who can spare from your toil and striving
Any effort to help the weak,
Ye too belong to the tale of great souls,
Yours is their praise though ye did not seek.

O not unthanked, O not forgotten,
Though no lips utter your earthly names,
Are the deeds or words which make life sweeter,
The thoughts that once were as beacon flames.
The cause ye suffered to hold and strengthen
May be the jest of a later age ;
The truth that was dearer than any attainment
May now belong to a rearward stage.

But the consecration of chief ideals,
The pure contagion of generous lives,
The good that out of a just cause widens,
Grace and truth that are his who strives,—
These are the gains earth's proud ones number,
Won by the patience of souls divine,
Who wrought in palace or hut or prison,
In street, in market, in cell or shrine.

With what passion of awe and pity
Our souls were moved if the veil were rent,
If from the nameless tombs of the ages
The nameless dead told how they were spent,
And the debt that time and his fame gaze over,
Were shown in the record of lives of shame,
And we saw how settled on ranks of martyrs
Rise hither the steps by which this race came !

SONNETS.

I.

OFt have I read with pity for his loss
Of him who strove through all his youthful years,
And farther on than youth, if he might gain
Some far-off goal, and reaching to it died.

Yet his is not a failure worse than that,
To win where triumph is the tragedy,
To strive with all youth's passion and man's will,
Trusting a promise fair and fairer yet.

Till life and opportunity all past,
Present and future but a pæan's space.
To enter in the hard-won citadel,
And face a grinning idol on the throne ;
To let the true pass to embrace the false,
And choosing know too late how ill the choice.

II.

THE New Year like a veiled woman stands,
Nought of her face we see, not yet we know
What lies within the gift of hidden hands,
Nor if those eyes or threat or promise show.

With maskless face but grasp too full the year
Departs who took or who denied, or wrought
Those prayers vouchsafed by gods unkind. We fear
Or hope no more, since we see all she brought.

Though we may move not Fortune, nor elude
Her messengers, we can resolve to bear
Her ills with patience when we must submit,
And deem her favour but a wayward fit.
Count all inconstant. What she gives, let's share,
But stand alone and tranquil when she's rude.

III.

SHY bird that in the quiet night apart
Dost mourn perhaps fled love or summer's end,
Whose passionate brief notes so often start
And cease as sudden, as if grief did lend

A voice to grief, and ere her sorrow's told
Bade the low tale to cease as being vain,
Remembering faith wins back no love once cold,
And the remembrance of lost love is pain !

Are ye too scorned if constant or forgot,
Or loved awhile and then are quite forsaken.
So know ye the most cruel human lot
To give love's wealth where not a thought is taken,
To serve a deity too high to need
Service or praise, too cold to know or heed.

IV.

IF Fame were the applause of any crowd,
Who would descend to earn it, who would crave
And to have paid its price of labour proud,
And to those senseless voices be a slave,

Seeing how apt and loud the swift applause
That follows some poor tumbler in a ring,
The well-mouthed rant of some new paltry cause,
Jest or a careless song, or folly on the wing?

Fame lives not in an idle tongue's report,
An idle mind's esteem; but in kind thought,
In the regard and well-based love of those
That will not make their object vulgar sport,
Nor love him less if more or less he wrought
So he is great, not what he does or knows.

V.

HE whom his art possesses with delight
To breathe a soul of grace in words alone,
Stays not to ask if he hath caught aright
That which the fashions of an hour will own.

It is enough if his deep dream be shown,
E'en if he fail to limn its fulness bright ;
He is content if its faint music's tone
Be held, if not its diapason height.

For she that is a mistress ne'er possessed
Bids him who serves her seek none other praise
Than hers, and eyes which never give back love
Through their austerity may light to prove
His labour worthy who though single stays,
And bends where her unworshipped altars rest.

VI.

ONE asked : What worth is service and where owed ?
He who gives youth and what to youth belong
Deserves some fairer guerdon than a song,
If strenuous won, by idlesse proud bestowed.

That mistress sole of thy devoir doth sit
Throned far above or thought or heed of thee,
And careless hears or scorning silently
The timid suit to plead that racks thy wit.

So many suitors hath she and so high,
So rich in gifts of grace and power and pride,
So strong by consciousness of their desert,
Darest thou think thy feeble songs and curt
Can move her favour from those others tried
And of her hierôphants approved and nigh ?

VII.

CEASE the vain quest, he urged ; swift pass thy years ;
Thou art not destined to attain that band
Who, differing each from each, in glory stand
By favour and desert and trial peers.

Is nothing worth thy suit thou mightest gain—
Love and soft vows and kisses, vouchsafed prayers,
Binding thee to thy race with tender cares ?
Heed how thou dost that kindly debt disdain !

Else, spent by selfish years and selfish toil,
Thou in thine age shalt be the unreverend spoil
Of work once thy delight, thy torment now ;
And failed of fame, of happiness, thy brow
Shall put on ashes to announce thy shame,
There where thou sought'st the shining crown of fame.

VIII.

THEN spake my mistress : Heed not till I chide ;
I spurn no proffered service, but none ask :
Who follows me a self-appointed task
Takes up ; yet if he seek my paths not overwide,

I shall not fail. Let him this lesson learn—
I give not that which some sue me to gain,
But in the strife my fancied gifts to attain
All secret strength and grace the suppliants earn.

Take courage, then ; suitors enow I know
That seek for what they dream I can bestow,
They would be poets yet to me all owe.
More than man has not gods nor men can give ;
By this and this alone shall any live—
Self-knowledge born when man with him doth strive.

IX

ALREADY half of life lies with the past,
And all my future years shall take their form
From those spent in the heedless waste of youth.
This like a sculptor's image grows in size,
But takes not difference with its greatness on.
So a man's life, when youth has come and gone,
May grow in outward seeming, but within
Shows the strong mastery of a long-past cause.

And this is part the irony of Fate,
'This is the lesson hard we all must learn—
Full half of life is spent ere we begin
To know its meaning, and the rest is lived
Not by the wisdom which those years have taught,
But by a Nemesis ourselves have wrought.

X.

'Tis well that joy supreme and gravest care
Come in the steady sequence of our years,
But seldom were life only smiles and tears,
That bliss or anguish which doth more outwear.
Scarce would we choose that doubtful boon to share,
And give a new race breath to take our fears,
A race that now our laid-off burden bears,
And thus pass on a legacy aware.

But joys that lighten days of ill and woes,
That rede us well against our hours of pride,
Alterned with breathing-times of deep repose
All in one group like thorn and leaf and rose ;
These make our kindly years as gently glide
Into our past as waves with wavelets slide.

TO THE POET.

WHAT cares the rose if the buds which are its pride
Be plucked for the breast of the dead or the hands of
a bride?

The mother-drift if its pebbles be dull inglorious things,
Or diamonds fit to shine from the diadems of kings?

Sing, O poet, the moods of thy moments each
Perfect to thee whatever the meaning it reach.

Let the years find if it be as a soulless stone,
Or under the words which hide there be a glory alone.

THE FAIRY STORY.

TELL us a fairy story, please ;
Only this once, ah do !
You don't know one ? Why, what a tease !
Come, tell us a story true.

The water of life and the talking tree,
The carpet and cap and purse,
Already you doubt. Why, then, bid me
Tales so condemned rehearse ?

There was a people who lived long since,
But never were satisfied ;
Wearied at last, their magician prince
Sent them afar to bide.

Never the day was long, nor night ;
Never a task was set ;
From dawn to eve was but one delight,
From eve till the new dawn met.

No rich, no poor, nor good nor bad,
This wonderful kingdom knew ;
Each shared with all whate'er he had,
And uncared the harvests grew.

Nor fears nor hopes, no toil, no care :
Was ever so blest a race !
Their life as an angel's life was fair,
Their land as an angel's place.

The sweet dawn came, and it brought no toil ;
No wearied limbs hailed eve ;
Came never a thought their bliss to spoil,
Came never a dream to grieve.

Throughout that land there was none a slave,
To others or to himself ;
No human machine his own life gave
To heap up another's pelf.

There was no love, for with love comes pain,
No children the fair land saw ;
By such dear cares were surely slain,
The peace which was its sole law.

They lived, I know not how many years ;
In that kingdom none grows old,
For death and sickness, and tears, and fears
Of its race may not be told.

But the prince whose magic had wrought this grace
Bethought him to test one day,
Whether the bliss of his transferred race
Had chasèd their past away.

He spoke but a word ; in the kingdom blest
A shudder went through the air,
And in all their souls a strange unrest
Came and foreboded care.


And the cloud that had hidden the life they left
Dissolved like their present lot ;
It seemed they dreamed, but the swift mind weft
The semblance of what was not.

Then with one sobbed prayer each human heart
Turned to its king and said :
O suffer that hence I may depart ;
Give back my life which has fled.

For now, O prince, a change has come,
I see who once was blind ;
Of this pleasant life I know the sum,
And the care of the life behind.

Yet give me, O give me back again
My heart which was dead with ease ;
Apportion me who deserve it, pain ;
Let sorrow upon me seize.

Your kingdom fair is for angels meant ;
No human hearts can beat,
Here in a region where Content
Takes her eternal seat.



To live—what is it but to love ;
And for that high love's sake
To bear and dare, all labour prove,
All sacrifice to make ?

TRUTH.

FAIR is of art the facile grace,
 Colour and flowing line,
That on a careless canvas trace
 Face or a form divine,
Morning on some familiar scene,
 Moonlight on quiet seas,
Life in a garden land serene,
 Eve in the dewy leas.

Look on this tortured plate that knows
 Searching of steel and fire,
Fixed as a human face that shows
 Scathe of long pain and ire.
Yet not the more for its stern lines here,
 Truth in exactness lies ;
Beauty is truth, nor need'st thou fear
 Division in noble eyes.

IMPRESSION.

F. W. L. A.

GRAVE thoughts were ours as down the hill
We slowly paced ; the twilight
Spread its soft dimness round and still,
Sank on the landscape night.

Rippling along the pallid stream,
Homeward the skiffs were drifting ;
All was calm as a thing of dream,
And all as a dream was shifting.

The voice we heard kept one low tone
Sad as a night-mood speaking,
Impassive, desolate, proud, alone,
A soul compelled, not seeking.

AD MATREM.

FORGIVE me if my words are weak
To sum the dear debt that I owe—
A debt which ever seems to grow,
Nor can I pay howe'er I seek.

Trust me, it is not all in vain ;
Though undeserving, so much love
Some answering nobleness must move :
Bear with me till I may attain !

NOCTURNE.

WITH the sunset splendid as a vision glows the west,
Far around its glories tremble on the distant water's
 breast
Like a sleeping dragon flashing part his mail and glitter-
 ing crest.

* * * * *

All the glory, all the splendour, of the sunset now is dead,
Grey and cold and far and pallid all the water's flame is
 fled,
Smote with sudden whiteness as a fair face blanched
 with dread.

With the darkness on the plain-land silence comes and
 brooding lies,
Breathes among the whispering scrub a cool wind in slow
 faint and fitful sighs ;
Like a thought it comes as sudden, like a thought as
 sudden flies.

Death and night, with this one boon I would fain be
satisfied ;
Morn and noon, O give me, with their fulness, passion,
pride,
Nor the lingering after calmness with its memories be
denied.

Then, before the night fall dark upon me in a pathless
path alone,
Give me thy forgetting, end a life when loveless grown ;
Since another dawn I see not, let me fall ere day be
flown.

RÊVE.

WHERE have I seen thee, beautiful shade,
That mine eyes cannot forget thee ?
In sleep a form revisits me,
In sleep again I see.

Eyes that I dare not aught refuse
Did I know their mute desire,
And lips that seem to part and speak
Words that in our gross air expire.

I wake and stare in the darkness idly,
For the beautiful face is gone :
Where have I known and where shall I see thee,
Girl with eyes where a sweet light shone ?

INFELIX.

LIGHTS of love no more may come
Where they came and lingered ;
Love's lips, hers, hence are dumb.

Dank ooze drips from tangled hair,
Slimy weeds and cruel
Veil a face, alas ! too fair.

Love's lips, hers, that kisses sought
In despair together close,
Heart now still so late o'erfraught.

BUTTERCUPS.

THE throng goes past, but now and then
Children and girls and grey old men
Stop at the market stall and gaze
On buttercups brave with lustrous gold,
Single or in a flowery maze.

One sees an English meadow fair,
Sweet is the calm and sunny air,
The May is white in the hedges low,
Daisies gleam in the grassy field,
A brimming brook seems loth to flow.

They grew for me in a year long past
Through God's acre that filled so fast,
Among the grass on the sunken graves,
Tall in the deep grass bent and bowed,
Where the wind went in long slow waves.

TO KHRYSÉ.

THESE verses, Khrysé, I address,
An unknown writer for the press,
Bid to describe your festival, not share.

Daughter of Midas, on your bare
Beautiful bosom, in your hair
And at your girdle gleaming always gold.

But no young joy in calm eyes cold !
Your lips no sweet smile is so bold
As to dare teach how they should kiss and pout.

Too young you are for care and doubt,
All your soft girlishness to flout,
So soon has gold's harsh Nemesis a place ?

Girl with the proud and tragic face,
Whose gold gilds out your youth and grace—
Thus an audacious pity I express.

ART'S PATIENCE.

HALF in sunshine, half in shade,
Silent at times as if afraid,
Or listening to the song she made—

A swift octave, each tender note
Upon the hot noon air afloat,
Nor once attempts the trembling throat.

Dear little singer, is it so—
Dost thou love's delights forego
That a perfect song may flow?

Is each triumph long rehearsed,
Note by note slow mastered first
Ere thou darest one sweet burst?

Then no more the poets trust
That full song perfection just
Sums a hundred failures past.

Be it so, then fail and fail,
If though late they can avail,
Win and scorn the wasted tale.

ARCADY.

STILL is there Arcady that poets sang ;
Not where men stupid as their sheep sued girls
As idly pretty and as cold as pearls.

'Tis where bright eyes bid brighter eyes to shine,
And kisses on red lips teach these to be
As eloquent in love's dumb speech and free.

Where but a touch though thoughtless is all rapture,
And lips too wise for words make sweetly clear
A thousand ways a thousand lessons dear.

Where memory lingers in a happy dream
And tender oracles from trifles draws,
Doubting and altering like a spring day's flaws.

Thus in a dream of happiness to come,
Passes a happiness that neither heeds
Till all the suit is told and all succeeds.

This is the land of Arcady, that scarce
Is dreamed till entered, or is known till left,
And prized the more when all its charm is reft.

For when we learn, and soonest when we teach
What is the secret of a priceless bliss—
Silence or speech, a glance, a touch, a kiss,

So that deep love interprets that to love,
The flaming swords are at the Eden gate,
And forth to speed us stern-faced cherubs wait.

À PETITE.

WHAT shall I give for a kiss?

Kiss me, perhaps I'll say then ;
For I hold—shall I answer amiss?—
There's no guerdon for this,
To kiss you and kiss you again.

Petite, would you sell but one touch
Of those lips, a half-open rose?
To kiss them were far too much.
Would you give, then? for such
Himself and his love a man owes.

ABSENCE.

AH, happy air that, rough or soft,
 May kiss that face and stay ;
And happy beams that from above
 May choose to her their way ;
And happy flowers that now and then
 Touch lips more sweet than they !

But it were not so blest to be,
 Or light or air or rose ;
Those dainty fingers tear and toss
 The bloom that in them glows ;
And come or go, both wind and ray
 She heeds not, if she knows.

But if I come thy choice should be
 Either to love or not—
For if I might I would not kiss
 And then be all forgot ;
And it were best thy love to lose
 If love self-scorn begot.

THE RETURN OF THE CONTINGENT.

OH, marching steps of soldiers home again !
Now the trees no longer hiding the men come at the
march,
Rank after rank abreast, and all are past.

Eyes for you only, O soldiers, clad in the yellow of the
desert ;
Eyes for you only, full-ranked, firm, marching in the wet
streets ;
Hail to you, gaunt-faced and sallow from blaze of foreign
suns,
Eager-eyed, threading the crowds for faces and forms
you know !

Oh, flags all fresh and fair !

Fresh and fair your banners.
But the famous banners are torn with the death-grip of
men and shot,
And stained with the soak of irredeemable blood,.

And grimed with powder of a hundred battles and earth
of a hundred lands,
Oh, famous banners, that to keep have cost a thousand
men !

Reminiscent of Egypt so steady you sweep along,
While the skies are grey with cloud, and the world is
sad with rain,
Remembering perilous halts in a desert accursed and
lone ;
Whilst the captain stars led west the march of the army
of the night,
Whistling solitary shots, and shrieks of far-off curses,
words not understood,
Forced marches under blazing skies through a dead sea
of air,
In a land of thirst and heat, unseen foes and doubtful
friends.

But the famous banners are torn, and the famous
regiments thinned ;
Fair are your flags (well for you) ; full are your marching
ranks.

The triumph is theirs who return ;
But to think of the dead soldiers unreturning, un-
triumphant,
Of the black blood's ooze, and the wild eyes heedless
staring,
And the hands convulsively gripped in the earth,
And the rigid forms of dead soldiers !

Who commemorates these ?

Weeping women in obscure houses remembering their
lost men,

Unconscious children that stop their play to ask of him
who is dead,

Laughing comrades with crape around their left arms !

The triumph is theirs who live, who return ;

Who thinks of the vanished possibilities of these who
died to make the triumph ?

Not yet for you, Australia, banners torn, blood-blackened,
grimed ;

Not yet ranks of soldiers gapped by the harvesting of
shot ;

Not yet to leave thy sons cold, stark, under unpitying
stars ;

Not yet to write victories on thy flags bought with the
incomplete destinies of men !

IN MIDDLE HARBOUR.

ALL day upon a wave that lifts and falls
With a soft sureness like a sleeper's breast,
The sunshine lies, a gold flood o'er the blue,
And flows unseen, unheard, in equal waves
Through the short vistas of the neighbour woods,
Filling them with a gracious mystery,
A purple haze, light almost, that alway
Flees coy before and, like a love disdained,
Comes far behind and fearing to be seen ;
Whilst higher up the slopes of gentle hills
The ethereal veil becomes a settled cloud
Translucent, yet not showing all it holds.

Here where a crescent bends of sloping beach,
Where the white water glides along the sands,
We gain an easy landing. Just above
A sparse sward spreads a little lawn, to where
The trees stand separate without undergrowth,
Save graceful bracken and some climbers few.
Not far within the trees where yet the shade

Is tender, for the morning still is young,
A tent is pitched, about it strewed all ways
The few utensils of our sylvan life—
Sylvan two days till we are citizens.

He would not claim a love for gracious scenes
Who chose our landing, and who placed our camp ;
Yet choice was ampler witness than were words ;
For opposite the dazzling waters washed
A line of rock whose face was worn along
By the incessant stress of that soft touch ;
And from the margin of the tide lush growths
Traced with their greens the sweep of rocky ledge.
Thence rose the sloping foreland, often steep,
But gradual elsewhere, and undergrowth
Led the gaze upward to the woody crest
Clothed on with that blue dimness almost light.
Now a fair valley lay between the hills,
Now lawns and slopes spread out beside the waves,
That in soft alternation moved along
Beaches of shell-strewn, tawny sands, or scarped
And channelled fronts of dank and mossy rocks,
Or little coves where the deep waters showed
Thickets o'erhead, and with the tide beat seemed
To mock the motion that the wind e'en gave,
Or shoals through which the sea chafed on to land.

So wild a grace that sylvan landscape had,
Such careless freedom in the watery flow,
Such pensive charm the woodland, so remote

All seemed from ken and frequency of the world,
It might have been some yet unpeopled land
But late discovered, and scarce even known.
From the far outer harbour came at times,
By distance and serenity of that place
So softened that their source might not be guessed
The clang of hammers regularly swung,
The music of ship-bells, or sudden scream
Of steam-pipes, and the dash of paddle-floats.
But in that spot no noise, save it were plash
Of waters upon shore, a sigh of wind
Through the stiff rustling foliage high in air,
Or the infrequent call of birds afar,
Came harsh enough a plaintive echo rouse
And frighten hence the glad tranquillity—
The hush where nature works and broods intent.
The gulls that skimmed the waters in their flight
So white, so swift they were, so silent moved,
Not birds but spirits seemed in glimpses seen.

Two of us of that harbour wonder proud
Planned these few days of freedom by the sea,
Lest our chance guest, in town on holiday,
Should leave, and know of Sydney but her streets.
A young man country born and country bred,
Whate'er was best of country mode he had,
Frank honesty of speech and ways, courage,
Large-handedness that knew not any check,
So it were his he gave, and better still
The genial mood that never won a friend,

Nor lost one by unkindliness of heart.
He used all manly freedom, and his words
Were those plain words that named the thing he meant,
Not these fair phrases which, like lily-cups
And leaves, oft hide foul depths. Where'er he came
He seemed to add some brightness to the place.
His face was youthful, though the brown thick beard
That from broad temples hid his cheeks to where
The soft moustache masked full firm lips, denied;
His eyes that saw all, and yet moveless seemed,
Brown orbs whose depth was full of light and fire,
Expressed not one but every kindly mood,
Fun that had never under-sting of scorn,
And all the abundance of his jocund life,
Translating these by glances that revealed
The genial temper of a manly soul;
Which the true voice another way proclaimed,—
Words that were pictures of the men he named,
And bursts of rippling laughter that said more
Than laboured etching of our speech might dare.
What muse will sing how those fair days were passed,
Too few to make us weary of that life
Lived linked with nature, and to which most men
Come with delight, as if they so returned
To the large manner of our primal race;
But not so few that when each charm was known,
Life's claims became more urgent from delay?
What verse shall celebrate that electric touch
That trembles from the unknown depths below
Along the tense line, or the proud triumph

When rise the struggling victims to the light ;
Or lazily disrobing in the shade,
Showing white men to the unwonted shine,
Walk down the sloping beach, and in one plunge
Know all the clinging coolness of the sea ?
What laughter heard ye, echoes, and what games
Ye saw, grave woods, by your austerity
In us, despising all men's short-lived youth,
Whilst we disported, and, the mark unseen,
Urged flying streams, with eager palms against,
When laughs betrayed the others, or one arm
Sustaining, with the other boxed and thrust ;
Or at close quarters wrestled without rule,
Nor recked what limb we held, or where, or how !
Then scorning towels, like a Norman lord,
Bathed in the sunshine as we bathed in the sea,
Racing along the sands till we were dry.
Then we rowed over to the opposing shore,
Chased crabs that, under hanging rocks secure,
Waved purple warning pincers and slid down ;
Walked through the woods, and talked the echoes thick,
And with repeated laughter, loud as his,
Drove to inglorious flight the Cockabur.

Evening came. Down from the western hills
The shadows crossed the melancholy waves ;
The tide ebbed from the beach, as it would go
With day, and visit some new dawned-on shore.
The sea-wind, blowing fitful since the noon,
Blew steady now, and crested all the bay,

And moaned within the wood like far-off seas.
Amid the trunks 'twas dusk. From where we sat,
And pensive watched the splendid day depart,
We saw the golden sunlight shadowless
Sleep on the upper slopes of neighbour hills,
Yet followed ever by the stealthy shade.
Slow the sun sank down through the flushing west,
And like scorned favours called his sunbeams there,
Mocked by the shimmer of some pallid stars.

Then we rose up and scattered to a task—
One gathered leaves and deadwood, one in search
Of water went, the third brought forth our food.
Against the white trunk of a mighty tree
The merry flames leaped up. Nor needed we
A second warning when the meal was spread—
A short delicious meal. Then pipes were lit,
And stretched at ease upon the swardy earth,
We lay in an elysium of calm,
Silent, but thinking kindness, as all smokers should.

Silent some while we lay till pipes were low,
And watched the Cross through boughs that now and
then,
Moved by the wind, now hid, now showed the sign,
And many a splendid constellation more ;
Till, tired of silence, prompted by some thought,
The countryman broke reverie with a tale.
For at that hour, when day is done, and night
Sunders the world of light and care and toil

From that small world where each soul moves alone,
Men's thoughts take tenderness upon them, and past
 hopes,
Faces long time unseen, voices unheard,
Long thoughts with past days linked and fled delights,
Unbidden come or bid ; and impulse comes,
Born of the loneliness and sense of loss,
To reach out hands and grasp some dearer hands,
From that reserve which daylight makes set free
Babble we care not what if but friends hear.

Five years ago, a boy, I went to make
Holiday with a brother living near ;
He, first a stockman in the north, went out
Into far Queensland, and thence many times
Had brought down herds of cattle half gone wild
In deserts on the Cooper or Paroo.
Tired of that aimless life, he wedded, chose
Some virgin land along a creek and farmed.
Eight miles from town he lived ; his farmland lay
One side a creek that never ceased to flow,
Fed by springs in the uplands, whence it came
Not seldom swollen by a sudden storm.
Far off among the hills rose in a wall
Of swirling water brown, and in its flight
Poured all ways, leaving where it passed a wreck.
Along the steep slope stretched the farm from there.
High up the house stood in a clearing wide ;
From the house-door the gaze swept on each hand
Along a range which, in a crescent bent,

In places steep and high, and everywhere,
As on the hills about us, where a tree
Could roothold find it grew, and prospered too.
Beyond the creek the land was not so harsh ;
The soil was bad, and such trees as there grew
Were few and stunted, and of useless kinds.
Out further, where this growth stopped, were the plains,
Treeless, lifeless, grassless half the year ;
A few dry lake-beds showed the summer's power,
Not conquered quite they lay. The brown wide plain
Stopped at their verge, and then scooped out below,
They filled their ovals or their circles all
With deep green tender grass, and round their rim
The long dead reeds rustled in every wind.

'Twas summer when I came, the farm looked well ;
The maize dropped silky streamers from the corn ;
Down at the creek the lucerne grew knee-high,
And the young fruit trees had begun to bear.
A fortnight passed, full of delight to me,
Till in the evening of a sweltering day,
Cutting the lucerne in the lower field,
I cast my gaze towards the further hills
And saw but a long smoke pall. Supper done,
We walked, my brother and his wife and I—
A babe he carried and a child I led—
Along the creek a mile or more, to where
We saw the fire distinctly. Not to fear
Needed we yet ; an acre of slow fire
Marching away from us along the hills,

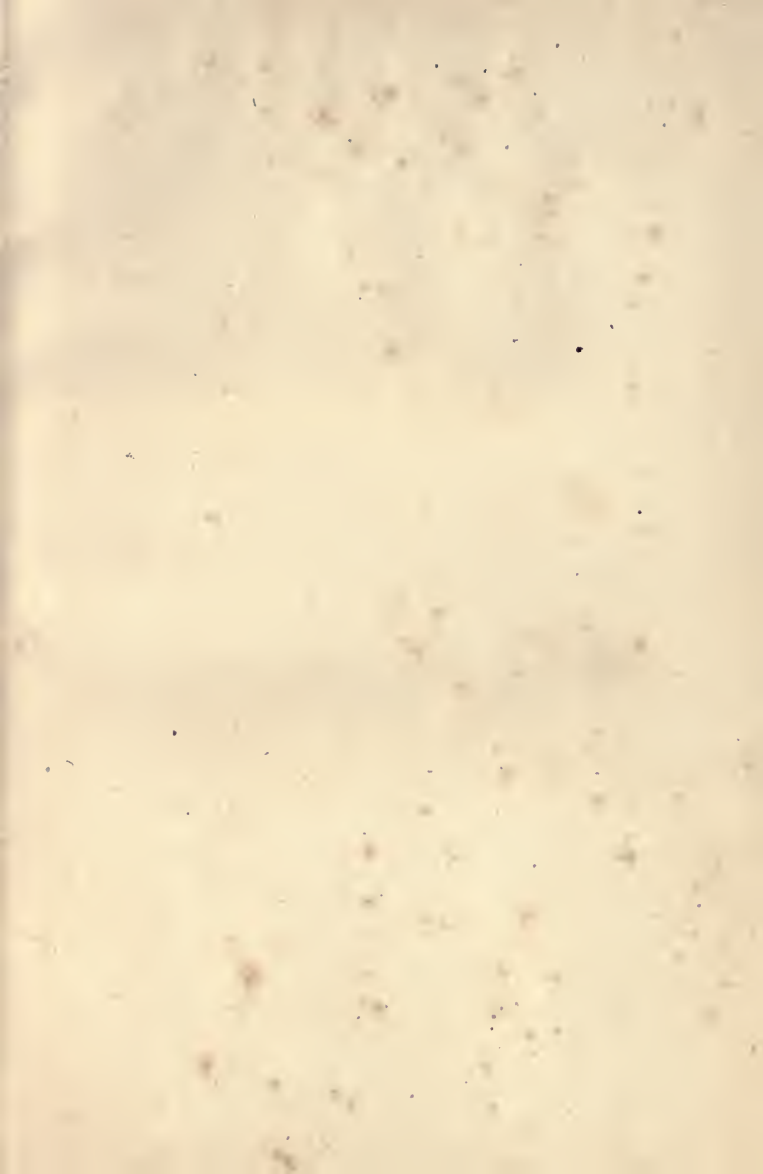
A stream of flame between its banks of wood.
Glad not to fear it we turned back at length ;
So through the cool and silent twilight hours
Gaily and slowly we came home again.
Next day was calm ; and in the harvest-field
The swish of scythes cut through the matted growth,
And long swathes followed us as on we toiled.
The hours came unperceived, and went ; after noon
A storm came up and settled to a wind.
What danger this might bring too soon we knew,
For, like a fog, the dense and pungent smoke
Hid all the intervening woods—nor smoke alone,
But feathery masses of white ember-ash
Ghastly upon our sweating faces sank.
We left our work, and sought the house to calm
The fears that wrung us unconfessed the more,
Since we knew well how just the fear we chid.
The wood was all around us ; now too late
We saw how great mistake to set the house,
For fear of flood, right in the track of flame.
Leaving my brother to seek out his goods,
I caught the horses, yoked them in the dray.
Loth to leave first, saw he his children safe
Sitting among the piled-up household stuff.
We waited still and hoped the wind might change,
Or rain might come. The babies sobbed to see
Us all so grave, and heedless of their cries.
I at the horses' heads stood holding them,
The others near ; and through the evening dusk
And drift of smoke and blinding cindery ash

We saw by glimpses how the flames approached,
And heard the mighty roar. Louder it grew,
More lurid shone the fire ; now when a gust
Blew off the canopy of smoke it showed
A racing tide of flame, that e'en the smoke
Irradiated with an angry glow.
The wind flung down upon us blazing leaves,
Still glowing embers, and the swirling ash.
To stay was vain, and in despair of help
We mounted, and the frightened horses leapt.
Such a mad plunging drive ! And as we gained
The height above the house, one moment back
We gazed. Beyond the creek, the scanty bush
Afire, the valley seemed a smoky sea
Level ; but through the cloud some mighty tree
Flamed with his topmost branches. The dull roar
All other sounds involved. We saw it all
In one swift look ; but far our way along
Heard we the duller sounding roar behind.

That night, a shelter reached, the tempest came,
A furious rain with intervals of calm,
Strange windless calm that respite were and threat.
Then when the way was open we rode back,
Less to see what was spared than know the worst.
All up the slope from creek to topmost top
The fire had passed—crops, fences, orchard, all
Were ruined. Here and there a post or slab,
Charred to the very earth, still stood. The flames
Had done their fiercest work around the house.

Some fallen, some aslant, some few upright,
But from the ground sheer to their highest twig
The trees were blasted. Gaunt and black they rose,
Warped and distorted by the fearful heat.
The earth all round was strewn with wreck and spoil,
Although the rain so much had swept away.
Where late the house was but the chimney stood,
All lost beside in flame. We slowly rode,
No fences hindering, all about the place,
And did not mark a spot the fire had spared.

Yet when by twelve months older I returned,
Leaving my brother in his rebuilt house,
O'erlooking like the old a blooming farm,
E'en then the ruin could but half be hid.
Hence to the latest moment of my life
Mine eyes shall keep remembrance of that gaze
When, while the horses tore at the loose reins,
I saw the valley all a hell of flame.



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